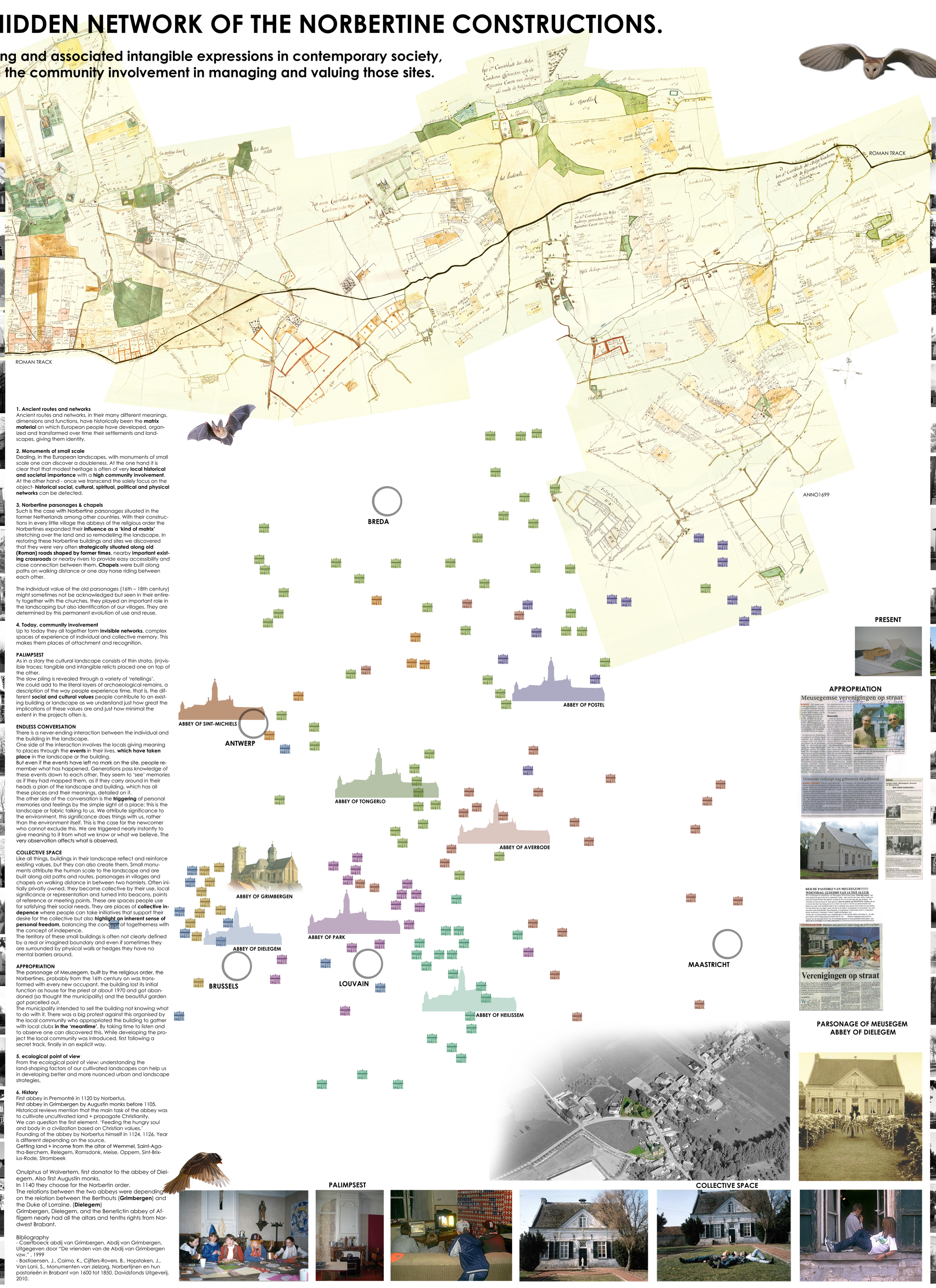
THE HIDDEN NETWORK OF THE NORBERTINE CONSTRUCTIONS.

Its meaning and associated intangible expressions in contemporary society, including the community involvement in managing and valuing those sites.



1. Ancient routes and networks
Ancient routes and networks, in their many different meanings, dimensions and functions, have historically been the **matrix material** on which European people have developed, organized and transformed over time their settlements and landscapes, giving them identity.

2. Monuments of small scale
Dealing, in the European landscapes, with monuments of small scale one can discover a doubleness. At the one hand it is clear that that modest heritage is often of very **local historical and societal importance** with a **high community involvement**. At the other hand - once we transcend the solely focus on the object- **historical social, cultural, spiritual, political and physical networks** can be detected.

3. Norbertine parsonages & chapels
Such is the case with Norbertine parsonages situated in the former Netherlands among other countries. With their constructions in every little village the abbeys of the religious order the Norbertines expanded their **influence as a 'kind of matrix'** stretching over the land and so remodelling the landscape. In restoring these Norbertine buildings and sites we discovered that they were very often **strategically situated along old (Roman) roads shaped by former times**, nearby **important existing crossroads** or nearby rivers to provide easy accessibility and close connection between them. **Chapels** were built along paths on walking distance or one day horse riding between each other.

The individual value of the old parsonages (16th – 18th century) might sometimes not be acknowledged but seen in their entirety together with the churches, they played an important role in the landscaping but also identification of our villages. They are determined by this permanent evolution of use and reuse.

4. Today, community involvement
Up to today they all together form **invisible networks**, complex spaces of experience of individual and collective memory. This makes them places of attachment and recognition.

PALIMPSEST
As in a story the cultural landscape consists of thin strata, (in)visible traces; tangible and intangible relicts placed one on top of the other.
The slow piling is revealed through a variety of 'retellings'.
We could add to the literal layers of archaeological remains, a description of the way people experience time, that is, the different **social and cultural values** people contribute to an existing building or landscape as we understand just how great the implications of these values are and just how minimal the extent in the projects often is.

ENDLESS CONVERSATION
There is a never-ending interaction between the individual and the building in the landscape.
One side of the interaction involves the locals giving meaning to places through the **events** in their lives, **which have taken place** in the landscape or the building.
But even if the events have left no mark on the site, people remember what has happened. Generations pass knowledge of these events down to each other. They seem to 'see' memories as if they had mapped them, as if they carry around in their heads a plan of the landscape and building, which has all these places and their meanings, detailed on it.
The other side of the conversation is the **triggering** of personal memories and feelings by the simple sight of a place: this is the landscape or fabric talking to us. We attribute significance to the environment, this significance does things with us, rather than the environment itself. This is the case for the newcomer who cannot exclude this. We are triggered nearly instantly to give meaning to it from what we know or what we believe. The very observation affects what is observed.

COLLECTIVE SPACE
Like all things, buildings in their landscape reflect and reinforce existing values, but they can also create them. Small monuments attribute the human scale to the landscape and are built along old paths and routes, parsonages in villages and chapels on walking distance in between two hamlets. Often initially privatly owned, they became collective by their use, local significance or representation and turned into beacons, points of reference or meeting points. These are spaces people use for satisfying their social needs. They are places of **collective indepence** where people can take initiatives that support their desire for the collective but also **highlight an inherent sense of personal freedom**, balancing the concept of togetherness with the concept of indepence.
The territory of these small buildings is often not clearly defined by a real or imagined boundary and even if sometimes they are surrounded by physical walls or hedges they have no mental barriers around.

APPROPRIATION
The parsonage of Meuzegem, built by the religious order, the Norbertines, probably from the 16th century on was transformed with every new occupant. the building lost its initial function as house for the priest at about 1970 and got abandoned (so thought the municipality) and the beautiful garden got parcelled out.
The municipality intended to sell the building not knowing what to do with it. There was a big protest against this organised by the local community who appropriated the building to gather with local clubs **in the 'meantime'**. By taking time to listen and to observe one can discovered this. While developing the project the local community was introduced, first following a secret track, finally in an explicit way.

5. ecological point of view
From the ecological point of view: understanding the land-shaping factors of our cultivated landscapes can help us in developing better and more nuanced urban and landscape strategies.

6. History
First abbey in Premontré in 1120 by Norbertus.
First abbey in Grimbergen by Augustin monks before 1105.
Historical reviews mention that the main task of the abbey was to cultivate uncultivated land + propagate Christianity.
We can question the first element. 'Feeding the hungry soul and body in a civilization based on Christian values.'
Founding of the abbey by Norbertus himself in 1124, 1126. Year is different depending on the source.
Getting land + income from the altar of Wemmel, Saint-Agatha-Berchem, Relegem, Ramsdonk, Meise, Oppem, Sint-Brixius-Rode, Strombeek

Onulphus of Wolvertem, first donator to the abbey of Dielegem. Also first Augustin monks.
In 1140 they choose for the Norbertin order.
The relations between the two abbeys were depending on the relation between the Berthouts (**Grimbergen**) and the Duke of Lorraine. (**Dielegem**)
Grimbergen, Dielegem, and the Benetictin abbey of Affligem nearly had all the altars and tenths rights from Nordwest Brabant.

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PRESENT

APPROPRIATION

PARSONAGE OF MEUSEGEM
ABBEY OF DIELEGEM

PALIMPSEST

COLLECTIVE SPACE

BRUSSEGEM CHURCH | BRUSSEGEM PARSONAGE | DEVIL´S BARN AMELGEN | SAINT-ELOOI CHAPEL | OSSEL PARSONAGE | OSSEL CHURCH | SAINT-ANNA CHAPEL | MEUSEGEM PARSONAGE | ABBEY OF GRIMBERGEN

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